

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 MADRID 00459 192241Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 459

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: ELAB, SP
SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH PRIME MINISTER SUAREZ:
IV. LABOR REFORM

1. DURING LUNCH JANUARY 18 WITH PRIME MINISTER SUAREZ AT HIS INVITATION, I ASKED HIM (AMONGST OTHER THINGS REPORTED SEPTELS), ABOUT THE FATE OF THE LABOR REFORM BILL NOW BEING DISCUSSED IN THE CORTES. SUAREZ SAID THAT IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR THE FACT THAT LABOR REFORM HAD INITIALLY BEEN SO CLOSELY LINKED WITH THE OVERALL DEMOCRATIC REFORM BILL HE WOULD NOT HAVE BOTHERED GOING THROUGH THE CORTES. HE WOULD HAVE ISSUED IT AS A DECREE LAW. BECAUSE OF THE LINKAGE AND BECUASE THE DEMOCRATIC REFORM BILL HAD GONE THROUGH THE CORTES, HE HAD DECIDED ALSO TO PLACE LABOR REFORM BEFORE THE CORTES AS A NORMAL BILL, NOT INVOLVING CONSITUTIONAL REFORM. THERE IS ALSO A CERTAIN ADVANTAGE IN USING THE CORTES SINCE APPROVAL BY THAT BODY SERVES TO REDUCE RIGHT WING SNIPING. BECUASE OF DIFFICULTIES WHICH HAVE BEEN ENCOUNTERED, HE NOW IS NOT SURE THAT THE LABOR BILL WILL COME OUT OF THE CORTES IN THE FORM HE WISHES. SUAREZ TOLD ME THAT IF THERE IS ANY REAL DOUBT, HE WILL SIMPLY REMOVE THE BILL FROM THE LEGISLATIVE CALENDAR AND ISSUE IT AS A DECREE LAW. HE IS DETERMINED THAT LABOR REFORM
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 MADRID 00459 192241Z

WILL BE COMPLETED WELL IN ADVANCE OF THE ELECTIONS.

2. I MENTIONED OUR OWN INTEREST IN LABOR REFORM AND THE CREATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS IN SPAIN. I SAID THAT, AS HE KNEW, THERE HAD BEEN CONTACTS BETWEEN REPRESENTATIVES OF AMERICAN LABOR AND SPANISH DEMOCRATIC TRADE UNIONS, PARTICULARLY WITH THE UGT. THE PRIME

MINISTER SAID HE WAS AWARE OF THESE RECENT CONTACTS, ALSO INCLUDING MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT. HE, HIMSELF, WOULD LIKE TO MEET WITH THE AFL/CIO REPRESENTATIVE THE NEXT TIME HE CAME TO SPAIN.

3. SUAREZ THEN EXPRESSED HIS CONCERN THAT THERE SHOULD BE A BELIEF ON THE PART OF THE USG AND US LABOR THAT PRESENT TRADE UNIONS IN SPAIN, WHATEVER THEIR POLITICAL COLORATION OR REGION, REPRESENTED MUCH OF ANYTHING. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE CLEARLY COMMUNIST WORKERS' COMMISSION WHICH ONLY HAD A MODEST FOLLOWING, THE UGT, USO, CNT, STV OR WHATEVER HAD LITTLE OR NO STRENGTH. HE DID NOT BELIEVE THEY WOULD EVER HAVE MUCH REAL INFLUENCE ON LABOR IN SPAIN. HE WAS TROUBLED BY MY MENTION OF US LABOR INTEREST IN THE UGT. THIS, HE INSISTED, WAS A MARXIST ORGANIZATION. HE WOULD REGARD US LABOR INTEREST IN UGT AS PREOCCUPYING BECAUSE IT MEANT THE US WAS DEALING NOT ONLY WITH A MARXIST GROUP BUT ALSO ONE WHICH HAD NO REAL INFLUENCE WITH THE SPANISH WORKERS.

4. I TOLD SUAREZ THAT AMERICAN LABOR IS STRONGLY ANTI-COMMUNIST AND ITS MAIN AND INDEED ONLY INTEREST IN SPAIN IS TO PROMOTE FREE AND STRONG DEMOCRATIC TRADE UNIONISM. THE RELATIONS WITH UGT AND WITH OTHER DEMOCRATIC UNIONS HERE WAS OF LONG STANDING AND I HAD SERIOUS DOUBTS WHETHER THE UGT, FOR EXAMPLE, COULD BE WRITTEN OFF AS SIMPLY MARXIST. AMERICAN LABOR WANTED TO HELP THE NON-COMMUNIST UNIONS, AS THE FRG IS ALSO DOING, SO THAT THEY COULD SUCCESSFULLY WITHSTAND THE EFFORTS OF

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 MADRID 00459 192241Z

THE COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED WORKERS' COMMISSIONS TO TAKE OVER THE LABOR MOVEMENT HERE.

5. SUAREZ INSISTED THAT PRESENT SPANISH UNIONS WOULD NOT PLAY A MEANINGFUL ROLE AND THAT THEY HAD LITTLE REAL FOLLOWING. THE VAST MAJORITY OF SPANISH LABOR WAS CONSERVATIVE AND DID NOT RESPOND WILLINGLY TO STRIKE CALLS AND AGITATION. HE WAS CONVINCED THAT ONCE THE LABOR REFORM BILL HAS BEEN ADOPTED NEW TRADE UNIONS HAVING NO IDEOLOGICAL ATTACHMENTS WOULD BEGIN TO SURFACE. IN FACT ONE WAS ALREADY IN THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT. THE US SHOULD LOOK IN THIS DIRECTION IF IT WANTS TO HELP.

6. I TOLD SUAREZ THAT I WOULD OF COURSE, TAKE NOTE OF WHAT HE HAD SAID. I SAID THAT WE DID NOT VIEW THE UGT IN THE SAME LIGHT AS HE DID AND ASSURED HIM AGAIN THAT US LABOR WOULD NEVER HAVE ANY RELATIONSHIP WITH COMMUNIST OR MARXIST-ORIENTED UNIONS.

7. COMMENT: I AM SURPRISED AND TROUBLED BY SUAREZ' STRONG VIEWS ON THE LABOR SCENE SINCE NO SUCH REACTION WITH REGARD TO UGT, STV, USO OR CNT HAS BEEN FORTHCOMING FROM OTHER MINISTERS, INCLUDING MINISTER OF SYNDICAL RELATIONS DE LA MATA, WITH WHOM THIS QUESTION HAS BEEN DISCUSSED. THOUGH HE WAS NOT SPECIFIC, THESE NEW LABOR GROUPS HE SPEAKS OF ARE THOSE THAT PROGRESSIVES FROM THE OLD REGIME NOW DEEPLY INVOLVED IN THE REFORM PROCESS (E.G. MARINT VILLA AND FERNANDEZ SUAREZ) HOPE WILL RISE FROM THE ASHES OF THE OLD FRANCO ERA SYNDICAL MOVEMENT (THE SSO). SOME SMALL GROUPS HAVE BEEN FORMED, SOME INCLUDING A POSSIBLE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC EFFORT IN THE LABOR FIELD) MAY GAIN RESPECTABILITY AMONG CERTAIN WORKER SECTORS, BUT IN THE MAJOR INDUSTRIAL BELTS (E.G. BARCELONA, BILBAO AND MADRID) CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 MADRID 00459 192241Z

THE ONLY REAL COMPETITION NOW ON THE HORIZON TO A COMMUNIST-DOMINATED LABOR SECTOR COMES FROM NON-COMMUNIST BUT ADMITTEDLY LEFTIST UNIONS SUCH AS THE UGT. I ENDEAVORED TO PERSUADE SUAREZ THAT OUR ONLY INTEREST, ONE QUITE CONSONANT WITH SPAIN'S INTEREST, WAS TO SEE NON-COMMUNIST UNIONS STRENGTHENED SO THAT THEY COULD HOLD THEIR OWN AND, HOPEFULLY, IN TIME COME TO OUT-WEIGH THE COMMUNISTS. HOWEVER, HE WAS NOT TO BE PERSUADED AND KEPT INSISTING THAT IT WAS

THE NEW LABOR GROUPS THAT WOULD ARISE THAT WOULD DESERVE ASSISTANCE AND THAT US LABOR WOULD DO WELL TO SHUN THE UGT AND ANY LIKE-MINDED UNIONS. STABLER

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